

# EMPLOYING A NEW LIBRARY DIRECTOR

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Employing the library director is a major decision for every library board. Trustees need to carefully determine the qualities, knowledge, and skills that they expect their next director to possess. From the candidates' point of view, the size of the community served by the library, the qualifications of its staff, the depth of library funding, the location and status of the library will all be of great interest. The goal of the board is to match their criteria for the "ideal director" with the candidate whose experience, skills, and interest in the community result in the best possible fit.

Boards of municipal libraries must abide by the process set out in the municipal code or they may need to work with city authorities to clarify the roles and procedures that will be followed when hiring the library director. Advisory boards may make recommendations to the library district throughout the hiring process.

## **Decision to Advertise and Search for Candidates**

Even though there may be highly qualified applicants among current library staff, it is good practice to conduct an external search in order to select the best person for the library. Internal promotion is a very desirable goal, but it should be balanced with the added value of outside expertise.

## **Appoint an Interim Director**

It may be several months before a new director is hired and on board. In the meantime, appoint an individual who can carry out the duties and responsibilities of the director and pay them a commensurate salary. Announce the interim appointment to the community, to library staff, and to other libraries.

Provide the interim director with the assistance needed to carry out operations and services. It is usually necessary to hire temporary staff to assure that services do not suffer due to the absence of the interim director from daily library operations.

## **Planning for the Search Process**

Before the hiring process begins there are fundamental assessments that should be carried out to assure that the library and the community clearly define the desired skills, knowledge, and abilities. Whether the search process is conducted by the board, or with the assistance of a consulting firm, the steps and decisions that will be required are essentially the same. The process and decisions are addressed below.

## **Assess Current Status of the Library**

In order to help the board both define and refine their criteria for the essential skills required of a new director, the board should consider both subjective and objective information that can be collected from a number of sources. Some of the information sources include:

Conducting an exit interview with the departing director. What are the strengths and successes of the library programs and staff? What might be the most important activities and priorities that might achieve future success? What knowledge and skills are missing? What needs to work better?

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Gathering opinions from library users and non-users. How successful is the library in presenting library services that meet community needs and interests? Is the library keeping pace with technology? Does the collection meet community expectations and needs? What segments of the community use the library? What segments of the community need to be introduced to the library? What are community priorities for programs?

Gathering current data about the library funding, staffing, salaries and services, and comparing it to other libraries of similar size and composition. (See the annual *Washington Public Library Statistics* publication or access the Washington State Library Internet site <http://www.statelib.wa.gov>).

### **Meet with Human Resources Staff**

Meet with human resources staff and possibly legal counsel to:

#### Draft the Job Description

Review the current job description with the library human resources specialist or with the city specialist. Look at job advertisements in publications such as *American Libraries*, as well as positions advertised by the American Library Association or the Pacific Northwest Library Association on their Internet job lines. The human resources specialist will usually draft the position description.

Be sure that the job description includes:

- Description of the essential requirements of the director position. For example: ability to analyze and implement library programs.
- Specific duties.
- Salary range and fringe benefits.
- Period of probation.
- Desirable characteristics relating to philosophy of library service and demonstrated willingness to be involved with the community.

The job description should be accompanied by the required minimum qualifications and experience including:

- Academic degrees in library sciences as well as course work and/or experience with public administration and communications.
- Ability to meet Washington State law requiring certification of librarians.
- Library and other management experience including budgeting, personnel administration, collective bargaining, etc.
- Understanding of all library operations including application of technology.
- Experience in working with a governing board.
- Active participation in library associations.

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- Support for Intellectual freedom and the American Library Association Code of Ethics.

Prepare information that will accompany the job description including:

- Information concerning Washington state certification of librarians.
- Application deadline.
- Request for resumé and references.
- Other pertinent information.

Review with Human Resources Specialist

Trustees must be very careful to follow all applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, or procedures. For example, it is illegal to discriminate against qualified applicants on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, religion, age, marital status, most handicaps, and country of national origin. Other topics to review include:

- Interviewing techniques, legal, and illegal questions.
- Open public meeting and public records requirements.
- Handling requests for candidate confidentiality.

### **Determine the Search Process**

There are several options to consider:

- The board as a whole may constitute itself as the search committee drawing in representatives from staff, local officials, Friends of the Library, foundation members, citizens, local librarians who will regularly work with the library director, and others.
- The board may appoint one or more of their members to chair a search committee that includes representatives noted above. The committee will usually recommend the top candidates to be interviewed by the board as a whole.
- The board may contract with a consulting firm to carry out the search and structure the interview process, again involving staff and community. Some boards decide to accept the recommendations of the consultant and proceed directly to interviews. Others may decide to collaborate with the consultant in order to evaluate the candidates and select interviewees.

Once the search process is planned, the next step is to lay out a timeline that identifies critical dates and responsibilities.

### **Determine How the Job will Be Structured**

Decide if the new director will be offered a contract or an open-ended agreement. Also determine the period of probation. Legal counsel should participate in discussing and preparing these agreements. City libraries must follow hiring practices established by the municipal authorities.

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### **Budget for Search Committee Costs**

Determine search committee costs or consultant fees. Determine the policy for reimbursing candidate travel, lodging, and expenses during the interviews, as well as policy relating to relocation costs.

### **Prepare Information about the Library and Community for Applicants**

The following information will provide potential applicants with information that will help them determine whether they are well suited to the library and community:

- Current description of the community.
- Library mission statement.
- Long-range program and plans of the library.
- Significant trends or changes anticipated.
- Other noteworthy information.

### **Advertising the Position**

Advertisements should highlight the job qualifications, salary range, community description, and impart some sense of the board's goals. The board may decide to provide succinct descriptions when a fee is involved, but include the complete position description and requirements in free sources, such as Internet job lines. In either case, the information must specify the application deadline, name and address designated for receiving the applications and request a resume and references.

The human resources staff is usually responsible for distributing the advertisement widely, taking advantage of both free and classified ads. State and local newspapers, national resources such as those listed by the American Library Association, state resources such as the Washington State Library WILF, and the Pacific Northwest Library Association jobs site on the Internet are other places that will attract candidates. Word of mouth is a viable option. Other libraries may also be willing to post announcements on their staff bulletin board.

### **Screening Applications**

The search committee will screen applications or determine the criteria that a subcommittee or consultant will use in their initial screening.

Candidate references must always be checked before the decision is made to spend the time and effort to interview. The library may request candidates to sign a release form allowing the library to check references of former employers as well as personal references. In addition to the letter asking about the candidate skills, knowledge and abilities, the mailing to candidate references should at least include the position description, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Because of potential liability issues, some references may only provide facts of employment. In addition to the candidate references it may be insightful to contact others who may have been associated with the candidate in community activities or statewide library activities.

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Some candidates may request that their application be kept confidential, not contacting their current employer. During the initial screening this is not unusual, but if the applicant is one of the top candidates being considered then the search committee should ask permission to investigate all references.

Before beginning to screen the applications the evaluation committee needs to agree on a standard list of evaluative criteria and develop an evaluation form. This form can also be used during interviews to rate the candidates. It helps to adopt numerical ratings, such as a scale of one to five, in order to generate comparisons and discussion.

It is good practice to acknowledge receipt of all applications as well as notify candidates who were not selected for interviews.

### **Interview Process**

Following are some interview processes and topics requiring board decisions.

- Determine how many applicants will be interviewed, usually three to five, and the order in which candidates will be interviewed.
- Determine the interview structure and contact the candidates with scheduling information and the policy for reimbursing travel, lodging, and other costs associated with the interview. Make reservations for accommodations as needed.
- Decide whether candidates will be interviewed on the same day.
- Finalize the list of standard questions.
- Designate one person to chair the interview process.
- Establish time and place for board and/or search committee interview. Establish time and place for staff and community interviews, announcing public forums in the newspaper, and other sources.
- Determine who will host the candidates and provide tour of library and of the community.
- Determine what process will be followed if members do not agree on the best candidate.

### **Prior to the Interview**

Provide candidates with copies of the library mission, planning documents, budget, financial history, organizational and staffing structure, and other applicable documents.

### **The Interview**

The interview is a mutual evaluation process for both the candidates and the interviewers. Assure sufficient time for in-depth conversations, questions, and follow-up.

Facilitate an open discussion that clearly outlines the expectations of the library board, the current status of the library, and the working conditions. Avoid making promises or leaving illusions that the board will be offering the job.

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Remember that the board must follow guidelines for “legal” and “illegal” questions. A general rule of thumb is: if a question does not have anything to do with the job, or is not vital to determine the applicant's ability to perform the responsibilities associated with the job, do not ask it. Interviewers must ask the same questions of all candidates.

### **After Interviews are Completed**

After each interview complete evaluation sheets and discuss the candidate qualifications to gather immediate reactions.

Gather and review evaluation forms and comments from staff and community interviews.

Rank the candidates based on the interview evaluations, taking into consideration the comments of the search committee, the staff, and the public.

Seek a consensus of the search committee. The committee and/or board may decide to do an additional interview with selected candidates, to ask further questions of references, or they may decide to re-advertise the position.

Determine whether the second choice candidate will be offered the position if the top candidate declines.

### **Conditional Job Offer**

Telephone the candidate with a conditional job offer, asking them to respond within a reasonable time period. A conditional job offer protects the library during this period. It allows the library to ask about needed accommodations or to require a medical examination. It also provides for satisfactory negotiations regarding salary, starting date, paying moving expenses, etc.

If the candidate declines the offer, or if negotiations are unsatisfactory, the position may be offered to the second candidate, or the search may be reopened.

Upon acceptance of the offer, send two official copies of the agreement or contract that include details of appointment, duties, salary, benefits, probation period, evaluation process, starting date, etc. Provide space for the candidate's signature of acceptance, and directions to return the signed copy of the agreement.

After acceptance, contact all other candidates, thanking them for their interview and informing them of the decision.

### **Notify the Interim Director**

Immediately after the candidate accepts the position the board should notify the interim director. Be sure to express gratitude to the individual at that time, as well as more formal appreciation when the interim appointment is completed.

### **Probationary Period**

A typical probationary period for a new library director is a year. The board and new director should agree on goals and the work plan to accomplish those goals during the probationary period. These agreements and the work plan will form the basis for formal and informal reviews during board meetings. A mid-point evaluation is an ideal time to consider how well the director is meeting the expectations of the board, and vice versa. It may be appropriate to mutually agree on opportunities for counseling or education to assure that expectations can be met.

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The final probationary evaluation will determine whether the library will retain or dismiss the library director. It is important to take full advantage of the probationary period to identify and jointly identify and deal with concerns in order to avoid future problems. (See Chapter 12, Working with and Guiding the Library Director.)

## **Washington State Requirement for Certification of Librarians**

***“...a library serving a community having over four thousand population shall not have in its employ, in the position of librarian or in any other full-time professional library position, a person who does not hold a librarian’s certificate....” RCW27.04.030***

Certification is granted to graduates of library programs accredited by the American Library Association and to other applicants “...when it has satisfied itself by examination that the applicant has attainments and abilities equivalent to those of a library school graduate and is qualified to carry on library work ably and efficiently.” Contact the Washington State Library for certification information.

## **Proposed Certified Public Library Administrator (CPLA) Program**

In 2001 the American Library Association Council approved development of the CPLA. It is anticipated that the CPLA will assist boards by providing criteria to evaluate candidate strengths. It will also be a long-term resource for continuing education for library directors and supervisory staff.

The proposed Certified Public Library Administrator program is a post-MLS certification program for public librarians jointly sponsored by the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA), the Public Library Association (PLA) and the Library Administration and Management Association (LAMA).

The proposed CPLA certification will enable public library administrators to:

- Further their professional education and development.
- Move to a higher level of practical professional expertise.
- Improve career opportunities through professional contacts.
- Demonstrate to colleagues, trustees and board of directors, patrons, and the wider information community that the certified person has acquired a professionally recognized body of knowledge and expertise in public library administration.

**Proof of Competency/Commitment:** The joint PLA/ASCLA/LAMA committee working on this initiative has defined nine core areas of competency for public library administrators. Candidates will earn the CPLA designation through testing, portfolio development, and/or attendance at sanctioned educational events, in a process that is being determined. The areas of competency are:

- Budgeting and finance
- Fundraising
- Library building, planning and maintenance
- Organization and personnel management
- Technology
- Building alliances and networking
- Strategic planning and marketing
- Serving diverse populations
- Current issues in public library management

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### **Sample Library Director Job Description**

The director of library services performs professional, managerial, and administrative work of a highly responsible nature in directing and coordinating the activities and facilities of the library program. With considerable independent judgment, discretion, and initiative, the director develops library collections, plans, and implements services and activities to meet present and anticipated community needs.

#### **Job Description:**

- Supervise general and day-to-day operation of libraries.
- Train and supervise library personnel to operate libraries, establish work schedules, evaluate job performance.
- Monitor changing needs of the community and promote library services through attendance at public meetings and special programs and through speaking engagements before community groups.
- Prepare library budget for presentation to proper officials; monitor library expenditures.
- Prepare long-range plan of library development and yearly updates.
- Coordinate library resources with other educationally and recreationally oriented programs and services available.
- Establish and administer library policies and procedures.
- Develop grant proposals when applicable.
- Keep informed on advancements and changes in the library field; plan and recommend development needs and improvements of library services.
- Plan and conduct public relations activities.
- Prepare, present and interpret statistical, financial and other reports to proper officials.
- Direct and supervise maintenance of the library facility; plan for new or renovated facilities.
- Perform related work as required.
- Communicate and work with library board and Friends organization.

#### **Minimum Qualification Requirement**

- Thorough knowledge of modern library purposes and standards and of professional library principles, practices and procedures.
- Thorough knowledge of modern management principles and practices as they relate to the administration of public libraries.
- Ability to plan, organize, develop and implement a comprehensive coordinated library service program.
- Ability to motivate, direct, and supervise professional, paraprofessional and clerical library personnel in a manner conducive to full performance and high morale.
- Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with employees, board members and officials, professional peers and the public.
- Ability to present ideas effectively, both orally and in writing.
- Considerable knowledge of reader interests and needs, and of books and authors.
- Ability to interpret community interest and needs.

(Adapted from the *Florida Public Library Board Manual*, 1988, edited by Elizabeth A. Curry and Susan Sellers Whittle for the State Library of Florida.)